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The vibrations of this momentary union were so magic, so penetrating and yet so vague, that, overwhelmed with emotion, I stepped to the window and stared on a forlorn field of nameless color, lined by the vertical cadences of defoliated trees shivering in the autumn wind; and the scene outside responded to the chords of this woman's soul; the vibrations became more and more intense, until room and landscape were wrapped in mystic night, and my soul alone soared into iridian regions of Olympian joy whose sinister portals can only be opened by a masterpiece of art.

From that moment I fully appreciated Tryon's paintings.

### A Conversation with Jean Francois Raffaelli about American Art.

IT was in spring, 1894, when M. Raffaelli, the painter of Parisian street scenes, received me for the first time in his room at the Café Martin, New York. It was an ordinary large hotel room, with bed, washstand, desk, bureau, and a few framed prints on the wall. Out of the corner windows we could see the red brick houses of Ninth Street, and a vista on University Place, a street scene just as if it was painted by the artist himself. And the dreary weather outside absorbed all color effects and threw a grey monotonous light over everything. I had been in this same room before, and remembered how barren and uninteresting it had appeared to me, but now it seemed filled with Raffaelli's personality, vivaciously moving about the room as he talked. The very frugality of his surroundings seemed to be a reflection of his work.

M. Raffaelli is a man of sturdy build, with a large, long face, dark hair and beard, and strong, bold features that seemed to have acquired the firmness and polish of bronze by being continually engaged in keen observations of life.

"Don't you think it would be best," I began, "if you would talk French, and I talk English. You also probably understand English better than you talk it."

"On the contrary, I talk it better than I understand it; but you speak French, do you?"

"Well, only so so, but I will try."

"Throw in an English word now and then," said Raffaelli, to encourage me, and then asked abruptly: "Well, on what shall I talk this afternoon?"

I saw at once that he had encountered some of our American reporters. "Oh, I do not know if this is for immediate use," I retorted.

"Oh, I thought it was for some paper."

"Perhaps,—at any rate I have prepared myself to ask you a few questions about American art. For instance, should an artist be national or cosmopolitan?"

"Art searches for beauty, and beauty is a condition of the soul. If I paint this street," and he pointed out the window, "it is no longer the street, it has become a reflection of myself, how I see it. And how we see things depends largely on the associations of our youth. Millet was a peasant, and after trying himself in different spheres, comprehended that after all he understood peasant life best, and remained the poet of peasants for the rest of his life."

"Do you think it necessary for young artists to go to Europe?"

"Yes, because Paris is the centre of modern art; Japan is another, but farther away. In France we have an artistic atmosphere which is lacking here. I believe it is absolutely necessary for an artist to visit Paris now and then."

"What do you think of those American painters who continually live abroad and paint French subjects; for instance, like Charles Sprague Pearce?"

"Mr. Pearce is the man who paints a sort of effeminate picture?" asked my host.

"Yes."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"How about Whistler and Sargent?" I asked.

"That is a very delicate question," said M. Raffaelli, hesitatingly. "I consider Whistler and Sargent American painters. They have preserved certain characteristics that are strictly American. Women in France and America are largely different, and Whistler has some of the grace and flavor of American women in his art. Dannat also remained American."

"I know of several young artists who painted American subjects—quite interestingly—before they studied abroad, but as soon as they have arrived in Paris, they become pupils of one or the other well known masters and throw away their originality to imitate the French!"

"They merely vulgarize art. I don't think much of a man who changes his ideas as soon as he becomes interested in something else. As a young man I traveled a good deal and absorbed everything, stuffed my pockets full with all sorts of impressions, and now," and M. Raffaelli drew his coat out over his breast, "I can give away with full hands. When I returned to Paris, it was a revelation to me how beautiful really my native city was; the streets, the people, everything. Artists here have told me that this country is not picturesque. Why, it is beautiful. Some of the streets where the trees are irregularly planted are particularly charming. Those houses, this window, can be made beautiful. First, when I painted street scenes, they said art could never render a *maison d'étage* beautiful, as they are once for all ugly. I said, why not? Take one of those grey houses as a background; before the house there are two or three trees, they are like fine lacework; then the black balconies can be treated like arabesques, and then on the sidewalk the people, moving to and fro, a glimpse of blond hair, some bright color, why, that is a picture! But there must be a general movement of the literary men as well as the artists to discover the beauty of this country. There was no particular beauty in the suburbs of Paris until we modern men discovered it. No, a few great artists must rise to show the public how beautiful this country really is; until then it will always be considered ugly."

"Do you think art schools necessary, as geniuses always find a way to develop themselves?"

"I wish they would do away with schools altogether."

"Just as there are no schools for authors—" I suggested.

"There should be no school for painters. I only went three months to an art school. What one learns there one can also learn oneself. For instance, a few years ago I took up etching. I

did not know anything about the engraver's technique. I simply bought a few books on etching, studied them, bought the material, experimented, and I eventually made some etchings as good as anybody else."

"What do you think about art criticism? Quite a number of our artists are of the opinion that art criticism should not exist at all."

"That is another complex question. Art critics should be men of taste. What is journalism? The Voice of the People. The public talks about pictures, praises and condemns, why should not the critics do the same? but they should be men of taste. Never artists; they are bad critics. No art criticism should exist."

Then M. Raffaelli asked me a question:

"Have you heard any artists' opinion on my work. Yes? What impression did I make on them?"

"I have defended you several times."

"Then they attacked me?"

"Yes; some said, your art was insolence. They could do it themselves. This was only the beginning of art. No high art like Abbey. They all agreed, however, that you are a man of brains. They seem to overlook that you have created a new style of technique for yourself."

"Yes, they now call me the most original of French painters. And the public of France acknowledges it, also the rest of Europe. They think my art is no high art? Well, it seems to me that to *elevate* a commonplace subject is most difficult, the true art."

"I am sure, M. Raffaelli, that all connoisseurs consider you the foremost painter of street scenes. They do not only admire your wonderful knowledge of Parisian life of to day, and your power of creating a most truthful impression of every place, but also that you give to every scene the spirit that pervades it, either from historical reminiscences or modern usances; for instance, one of the *grand* Boulevards you paint gay, in bright sunlight, the Pantheon sombre, the Jardin de Luxembourg empty of former glory, a by-street of Paris in a dull melancholy light, and the yard of a hospital with an atmosphere as thin and frugal as the diet of the promenading convalescents."

Before I left, M. Raffaelli arranged with me a slumming expedition through the poorest quarters of this city (every bit as interesting as Paris), of which I may speak some other time.

ALDEN WEIR (who lately had an exhibition at Boussod, Valadon & Co.) appears different with every year. What a change from the delicious, ethereal flower pieces at Inglis' private gallery to the rough and masculine "Gen. Gilmore." Alden Weir is an experimenter, yet his experiments are sincere and therefore far superior to those of the Tarbellites. A remarkable picture is his "Captain Zilinski;" it is refreshing in its naive, brutal strength, so suitable to the subject: the inventor of that murderous weapon, the dynamite gun. Even without knowing the sitter, you might vouch that it is a striking likeness,—even more than a likeness, as it gives us the environment in which this man is living as well as Alden Weir's comment on it; the streak of vermilion of the coat lining is a *bravura* touch.

PHILADELPHIA can be proud of possessing Thomas Eakins. Among our mentally barren, from photograph working, and yet so base, sweet caramel artists, it is refreshing, like a whiff of the sea, to find at least one rugged, powerful personality like Thomas Eakins. How crude his art is at times we see in the startling effect of blood in Dr. Gross's right hand. Eakins can never hide the calm and keen, perhaps brutal observation of his anatomical researches. How grotesque his art can be, we find out in looking at the lean anatomical study of Christ on the Cross—the strangest and strongest Crucifixion ever made in this country. Eakins' work may be, here and there, too severe to be called beautiful, but it is manly throughout—it has muscles—and is nearer to great art than almost anything we can see in America.

THE Decadence has also made its appearance in American painting. On my various wanderings through American studios here and abroad, I ran across it now and then, but it generally impressed me like a haphazard intimidated attempt (for instance Paxton's in Boston), not as a self-reliant fact. In Henri of Philadelphia, however, decadence furnishes the leading characteristic of his work. Hitherto he has painted two subjects well. First: beach scenes, perspective views of piers and stretches of sand, empty or crowded by a variegated throng, always under the blazing sun—that look like caskets of jewels, or out-of-door effects à la Monticelli. Second: a certain type of woman bred by his imagination; originally, I suppose, descendants of the Fur Jacket and Yellow Buskin ladies. They are usually dressed with Whistleresque simplicity in a dark greenish blue that reminds one of snakes. They have the peculiar habit of placing the lamps in their Bohemian boudoirs on footstools or on the floor, causing their faces to be illumined like Irving in The Bells. The most remarkable characteristic in them is their face; their features taken one by one are perhaps not much out of the ordinary, yet the whole expression has something morbid, hectic, vampire-like about it,—it impresses like a nightmare, resembles nothing in particular—in short, is *Henriesque*. He asserts that he actually sees things as he paints them, possibly, possibly. I only know that if Henri would paint himself just as he appears to me, the portrait would make a fit companion to his nightmare woman. At all events his eccentricities, whether affected or in-born are strong enough to make him the most artistic modern personality in the A. A. A., 131 boulevard Montparnasse, and the leading representative of the decadence in American painting. And the little clan, that assembles in his studio in the evenings—well, let them stuff this note in their short pipes and smoke it!

A BIT of patriotism—an imitation of which would be very desirable in this country—was shown by the Tretjakoff brothers in Russia, when they presented the city of Moscow with an art collection of 844 pieces, mostly paintings, and a building, free of mortgage, for exhibition, on the only condition that no admission would ever be charged. Only 83 pictures are by foreign artists, the rest are by Russians; Yeretshagin alone is represented by 230.